

ly-embellished tropical nature speedily yielded the Greeks enjoyments of another kind. The gigantic forms of hitherto unknown animals and plants filled their imaginations with the most exciting images. Writers, whose dry scientific style is usually devoid of all animation, became poetic when they described the characteristics of animals, as, for instance, elephants; or when they spoke of the height of trees, whose summits can not be reached by the arrow in its flight, and whose leaves are larger than the shields of the infantry; of "the bamboo, a light, feathery, tree-like grass," "each of whose jointed parts (internodia) may serve for a many-oared keel;" or of the Indian fig-tree, that takes root by its branches, and whose stem has a diameter of twenty-eight feet, and which, as Onesicritus remarked, with much truth to nature, forms "a leafy canopy similar to a tent, supported by numerous pillars." The tall, arborescent ferns, which, according to my opinion, constitute the greatest ornament of tropical scenery, are never mentioned by Alexander's companions,\* although they speak of the noble, fan-like umbrella palm, and the delicate and ever-fresh green of the cultivated banana.†

The knowledge of a great portion of the earth may now be said to have been opened for the first time. The objective world began to assume a preponderating force over that of mere subjective creation; and while the fruitful seeds yielded by the language and literature of the Greeks were scattered

\* Humboldt, *De distrib. Geogr. Plantarum*, p. 178.

† I have often corresponded, since the year 1827, with Lassen on the remarkable passage in Pliny, xii., 6: "Major alia (arbor) pomo et suavitate præcellentior, quo *sapientes* Indorum vivunt. Folium alas avium imitatur, longitudine trium cubitorum, latitudine duum. Fructum cortice mittit, admirabilem succi dulcedine ut uno quaternos satiet. Arbori nomen *palæ*, pomo *arienæ*." The following is the result of my learned friend's investigation: "Amarasinha places the banana (*musa*, *pisang*) at the head of all nutritive plants. Among the many Sanscrit names which he adduces are *varanabuscha*, *bhanuphala* (sun fruit), and *moko*, whence the Arabic *mauza*. *Phala* (*pala*) is fruit in general, and it is therefore only by a misunderstanding that it has been taken for the name of the plant. In Sanscrit, *varana* without *buscha* is not used as the name of the banana, although the abbreviation may have been characteristic of the popular language. *Varana* would be in Greek *ὀβάρενα*, which is certainly not very far removed from *arienæ*." (Compare Lassen, *Ind. Alterthumskunde*, bd. i., p. 262; my *Essai Politique sur la Nouv. Espagne*, t. ii., 1827, p. 382; and *Relat. Hist.*, t. i. p. 491.) The chemical connection of the nourishing amyllum with sugar was detected both by Prosper Alpinus and Abd-Allatif, and they sought to explain the origin of the banana by the insertion of the sugar-cane, or the sweet date fruit, into the root of the colocasia (Abd-Allatif, *Relation de l'Égypte*, trad. par Silvestre de Sacy. p. 28 and 105).